

Response to Thomas Hughson, S.J., “Classical Christology and Social Justice:
Why the Divinity of Christ Matters”

When I mentioned to some colleagues that I would be responding to this paper entitled “Classical Christology and Social Justice: Why the Divinity of Christ Matters” I received the same responses: now that sounds interesting, that’s a paper I would like to read. And indeed, I must thank Fr. Hughson for his interesting, thorough, and insightful paper that was a pleasure to read.

When I first saw the title, I was expecting something on a theology of kenosis or solidarity, but instead Fr. Hughson offers something very creative and original by linking the divinity of Christ to what Lonergan calls the good of order.

Fr. Hughson begins by clearly demonstrating the ecumenical nature of the “division between faith and everyday life” the “disjunction between sincere faith in people of good will on one hand and the societal implications of their faith especially in the dimension of social justice on the other.” He queries why the impressive body of official magisterial literature that is Catholic Social Teaching has not been appropriated at popular, public, practical, and spontaneous levels. Is it due to a privatized notion of faith or because the social justice discourse has employed policy and not theological language? In any case, the actual situation is an example of non-reception of official teaching. Questions arise: how is this case unique or not to other contemporary examples of non-reception of magisterial teachings? How does the church respond to this non-reception?

Social justice, Dr. Hughson argues, is not peripheral but central to Christian faith because it arises out of who we confess Jesus Christ to be. And after Chalcedon we confess Jesus Christ to be fully human and fully divine. So Christ’s full divinity, no less than his full humanity (as has often been emphasized recently), must matter for social justice. How we understand Chalcedon and Constantinople III have implications in concrete Christian living and the unfolding of history.

Fr. Hughson’s argument centers around the fact that creating is an operation that cannot be predicated of the created human nature of Jesus Christ. This distance between the creating divine nature

and the created human nature maintains the necessary distinction between the 2 natures of Christ, beginning with, during, and after the Incarnation. Creating is a foil for chaos and is the basis of the good of order, a human world “structured by intelligence, by reasonable judgment, by decision and action.”¹

Hughson draws heavily on the distinction made by Justin Martyr, and later developed by Jacques Dupuis, between the Logos *ensarkos* and the Logos *asarkos*, to maintain the distinction between the two natures in Christ. Because of his concern for religious pluralism, Dupuis is interested in preserving the historical reality of Jesus Christ that cannot exhaust God’s mystery and saving power. In this sense the revelation of the divine in Jesus Christ remains “limited” or “finite.”² The *Logos ensarkos* refers to the universal sacrament of God’s saving action in history and *Logos asarkos* to the expression of God’s “superabundant graciousness and absolute freedom.”³

I would like to offer some comments as extensions of Hughson’s thought; they are grounded in what I think is necessarily the context for Christological discussions regarding the divinity of Christ, the Trinity:

First, regarding method: theologians such as Haight, Schillebeeckx, and Sobrino, propose that the Chalcedonian- Constantinopolitan Christological definitions cannot “stand alone” or “over” any contemporary Christology but must stand under the judgment of the Gospel witness and an understanding of the historical Jesus (a sentiment with which Hughson would agree). Similarly, Christology, especially a high Christology such as the one proposed in the paper, must take into account Trinitarian theology.

The definitions of Chalcedon and III Constantinople follow the Trinitarian definitions of Nicaea- Constantinople and should be taken into account hermeneutically.

Second, some indication of the limitation of Justin Martyr is important. Dupuis is dependent upon Justin Martyr for whom the distinction between Logos *asarkos* and *ensarkos* takes place in the absence of any developed pneumatology. Justin could not clearly distinguish between the Logos incarnate and the

¹ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections” *A Third Collection*. ed. Frederick Crowe, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 82

² Jacques Dupuis, S.J., “The Truth Will Make You Free” in *Louvain Studies* 24 (Fall, 1999) 235.

³ Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as Model” in *The Myriad Christ: plurality and the quest for unity in contemporary Christology*, ed. T. Merrigan and J. Haers (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000) 91.

Holy Spirit. There is a lack of clarity on the role of the Son and the Spirit as well as some hints of subordinationism.⁴ I'm not suggesting Hughson does this, I'm just cautioning against the isolation of Christological reflection from its Trinitarian context.

Next, as Hughson states, the creative act is Trinitarian: everything proceeds from the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of God's self-communication that progressively reveals the Word by the power of the Spirit through the Incarnation to the eschaton. Anytime we speak of creating, we are speaking about external Trinitarian operations. Hughson could clarify the "essential" and "appropriated" attributes of the Trinity and the persons of the Trinity with regard to creation. Following Aquinas, the creative power of God belongs to the unity and nature of the Trinity (ST I, q. 32, a.1); however, creation is appropriated to the Father while reconciliation to the Son and consummation to the Holy Spirit (ST I, q. 39, a 7-8). How would essential and appropriated attributes sharpen his proposal? Also, within a Trinitarian context, the complementary role of the Holy Spirit in creating should be explored. The action of the Holy Spirit in creation is well attested by scripture (Gen 1:1-2, Ezekiel 37:1-9, John 6:63; 1Cor 15:4-5) and in the Fathers.

Fourth, how is the Logos present in history aside from the Logos *ensarkos*? This question comes from my reading of Lonergan and Doran's 4-point hypothesis and theology of missions. Can we speak of "seeds of the word" without first speaking of the gift of the Spirit that sows the seeds? Hughson alludes to this at the beginning of section II, but it would be interesting to develop it more explicitly. How does the presence of the Logos outside of the Logos *ensarkos* relate to the uniqueness and historicity of the Jesus Christ event? Fr. Doran's lecture hints at answers to this question in terms of the invisible mission of the Word. My concern is the danger of obscuring the role that properly belongs to the Holy Spirit?

Lastly, social justice must not only be conceived of in terms of the good of order but also as social grace. As Prof. Hughson mentioned in his 5th and 6th points, Doran's development of the interrelation of values is particularly important to any discussion of the good of order that social justice seeks. These values are located in the recurrent emanation of the word of authentic value judgments and

⁴ Gerald O'Collins, S.J. *The Tripersonal God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 91.

acts of love in human consciousness (personal value) due to the grace of mission of the Holy Spirit (religious value). Religious value is the source of history-making, of progress through schemes of recurrence in realms of cultural, social and vital values, and wherever genuine and authentic progress takes place, the Holy Spirit is present.⁵

The divinity of Christ certainly matters to social justice, but equally important in any systematic reflection is to consider also role of the Spirit and why the immanent Trinity matters to social justice.

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⁵ Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 77, 204-205.